Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Nankeen Night Heron chick – photo by Joy Weatherill

Fauna of the Box-Ironbark Woodlands – Connecting Country's Monitoring Programs 2012-2018.

Tanya Loos, Monitoring and Engagement Coordinator for Connecting Country, was our guest speaker on July 13th. Connecting Country (CC) is a community-operated not-for-profit organisation working since 2008 to restore and enhance biodiversity and improve the productive natural environment across the Mount Alexander region in central Victoria. Tanya outlined the key elements underlying CC's operations: *supporting 30 Landcare* groups, *engaging the community* through educational workshops and bird walks, *monitoring and evaluation* based on science to measure outcomes of *On-ground works.*

The on-ground works include planting (usually using the direct seeding technique) of paddocks to restore bushland habitat; supplementary manual planting where species are missing; weed and rabbit control; and encouragement or restoration of woody debris – all aimed at restoring connection of natural habitats across our region, on private properties in cooperation with committed owners.

Measuring changes across landscapes to evaluate these programs requires scientific selection of indicator species – species that are sensitive to environmental changes, and are sufficiently detectable and measurable. Working with Professor Andrew Bennett (Landscape Ecology, Latrobe University) CC monitors the Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan) and a range of woodland birds. Phascogales range up to 100 ha, eat spiders and centipedes etc, and need large old trees for breeding sites – rare in our region. 450 nest boxes have been installed over 100 sites involving 100 landholders, monitored from 2011 to 2018 by CC staff and many volunteers. In 2011 14% of the boxes had Tuans, rising to 45% in 2016 – despite drought. Latrobe University PhD student Jess Lawton is currently analysing

Connecting Country's Brush-tailed Phascogale data, with the results to be released soon.

Bird monitoring has involved 50 sites since 2010, surveyed 4 times each year using Birdlife's standard 20 minute 2 ha procedure. 34 species are monitored, with particular emphasis on residents like Brown Treecreepers and Diamond Firetails. The geographic areas are assessed to determine populations in paddocks, gullies, slopes and restored areas. The good news is that some threatened species that are declining elsewhere are being maintained in our region. Detailed analysis of 8 years data is currently underway by Dr Kerryn Herman at Birdlife Australia.

Connecting Country's long term restoration and monitoring work has been supported by federal and state governments, but now increasingly by philanthropy through the Wettenhall Foundation (a supporter from the start), the Helen Macpherson-Smith Trust, and the Potter Foundation. The Potter Foundation funded work on reptiles and frogs - a project that began in 2016 over 48 sites. The CC website has extensive information about the organization and its projects past and current, and how one can get involved as a volunteer. We are fortunate that the Mt Alexander Shire has such a dynamic, coordinating team and so many landholders committed to improving the natural habitat and protecting threatened species. Our thanks to Tanya for her illuminating presentation, and for arranging the excursion to view CC's work in action. - Peter Turner

SEANA in Castlemaine

The Spring 2019 meeting of the South Eastern Australian Naturalist Association will be held in Castlemaine from Friday 4th October to Monday 7th, hosted by CFNC. After registration on the afternoon, there will be an informal meal and guest speaker on the Friday, with excursions arranged for both Saturday and Sunday. There will be a dinner on Saturday followed by a guest speaker. For participants who wish to stay on, we will probably arrange one or two excursions on the Monday morning.

Up to 100 members of Field Naturalists Clubs from across the state are expected to attend. CFNC members who have attended previous SEANA gatherings have enjoyed meeting fellow naturalists and learning about landforms and ecology, flora and fauna across the state. It is about 20 years since CFNC last hosted a SEANA meeting.

Your committee is seeking 2 or 3 volunteers to join the organizing sub-committee, which will start work in October this year. Early next year we will be seeking ideas for excursions and volunteers to assist during the meeting in October 2019.

- Peter Turner

Transformation in Walmer

Peter Turner

Our excursion on Saturday 14th July was to Cullen Gunn's property on Ottery's Scrub Rd, Walmer, arranged and led by Tanya Loos. The Gunns purchased this 280 acre, former grazing property in 2003, when it had many large old paddock trees. Over the past 15 years they have established several small wood lots, and have used direct seeding vegetation methods to restore large sections of the property, initially with DELWP.

We drove into the property past some well grown woodlots, a pile of old stumps and large tree trunks, to meet Cullen Gunn, who told us about his involvement as an early participant in Connecting Country program, which has run three direct seeding projects, and regular bird surveys at the property since 2010. Cullen then led us through several areas to demonstrate different stages of the impacts of direct seeding, from initial tiny seedlings sprouting in the shallow furrows to dense lines of wattles, casuarinas and eucalypts up to 4 metres high.

Initially, bird surveys found only 10 species typical of paddocks - recent surveys have identified 34 species, with a total of 53 species over 28 visits. Nest boxes for phascogales have been installed and monitored, and recently Brush-tailed Phascogales have been observed.

After hearing Tanya's presentation on Connecting Country's work at our General Meeting the previous evening, it was fascinating to see how their projects, in collaboration with committed landowners, are indeed reconnecting sections of country for the benefit of wildlife – and all of us. Our thanks to Cullen Gunn for hosting our visit, and to Tanya Loos for making the arrangements.

As an aside, the old stumps and tree trunks came from the Ravenswood roundabout roadworks; most will be taken to Trust For Nature's Ned's Corner property as woody debris for habitat.

Left: Shallow groove exposed during direct seeding, into which seeds are spread by the equipment, and right: new growth

Left: More advanced growth with one of the original paddock trees, and right: well developed growth of mixed species. Over time, the corridors between the lines of trees and shrubs will be vegetated by self seeding.

St Abbs Head Nature Reserve in the Scottish Borders - Northern Hemisphere Summer

Joy Weatherill

In June I had an amazing time when I spent a week at St. Abbs Head Nature Reserve in the Scottish Borders. My accommodation was in the Flag House, among the cottages up at the lighthouse on the headland - about 10 metres from a 90 metre cliff drop, and 60,000 nesting birds!

It is significant to consider the geology of the Nature Reserve because the structure of the rocks offers suitable nesting sites for birds.

St. Abbs headland is made mostly out of lavas - purple and red-brown in colour. They have been radiometrically dated to being about 400 million years old. To the west of the headland lies Pettico Wick. On its east side are the unstructured pink and purple lavas that erupted from volcanoes about 400 million years ago, and on the west side are sedimentary rocks - deposited underwater as layers of mud around 450 million years ago. These were pushed up into mountains and squeezed into folds.

The sheer cliffs, offshore stacks and narrow gullies provide a habitat for wildlife. Rows of Guillemots could be seen sheltering along the inner layers

of folds of sedimentary rocks and on cliffs and rock stacks. Pettico Wick lies on the St Abbs Head fault - a line of weakness between two very different types of rock.

The majority of birds nesting here are Common Guillemots and Black-legged Kittiwakes. Other sea birds I saw were Razorbills, Shags, Fulmars and Northern Gannets.

In Spring, Guillemots gather in massive and tightly grouped breeding colonies. I could see that, being late June, the young were fairly advanced. The Guillemot is a member of the Auk family - the most common auk in the British Isles. The females lay a single egg directly on a ledge and their eggs are conical - to prevent them from rolling off. At three weeks old, they take a dramatic plunge to the sea below. In the late afternoon, many could be seen swimming not far from shore - like thousands of little black and white dots. The first morning when I woke up and looked out, I thought they had all left, until I got my binos - they were like rippling velvet - most had turned their dark backs towards the sun to warm up. Kittiwakes build grass and mud nests on the cliff faces on either side of the lighthouse. They are generally together in an area - but prefer to make their nests on small ledges where they can be separate as a pair. And yes, they do say “kittiwaaake”.

I saw Razorbills in pairs or small groups among the Kittiwakes. Shags often nest low down on the cliffs, and a high sea can spell disaster for the downy chicks that are not waterproof for up to 8 weeks, and nests can be washed off the rocks. Puffins dig or use ready-made burrows on the cliff tops when nesting. I did not see any here, but saw a lot on Staple Island in the Farnes. All the nesting birds are harassed by the Crows, Jackdaws and Kelp Gulls.

In 2017, for the first time in living memory, a pair of Northern Gannets nested in this area, but were not successful in rearing a chick. Keen locals were checking each day to see if they were nesting again; but as I could see two birds circling around in the evenings, they had obviously not reached that stage.

Drop down behind the headland and you are out of the blustery wind, as Mire Loch lies in the crease of the fault line. It is a whole different environment, with bushes and meadows of wildflowers -carpets of Thrift or Sea Lavender, Bird's foot Trefoil, lots of deep purple Spotted and Marsh Orchids and many others. Birds on the Loch included two nesting Mute Swans, Pochards, Tufted Ducks and Mallards. In the bushes, Chaffinches and Bullfinches were singing. By the loch I also had a close encounter with a badger. A memorable week.

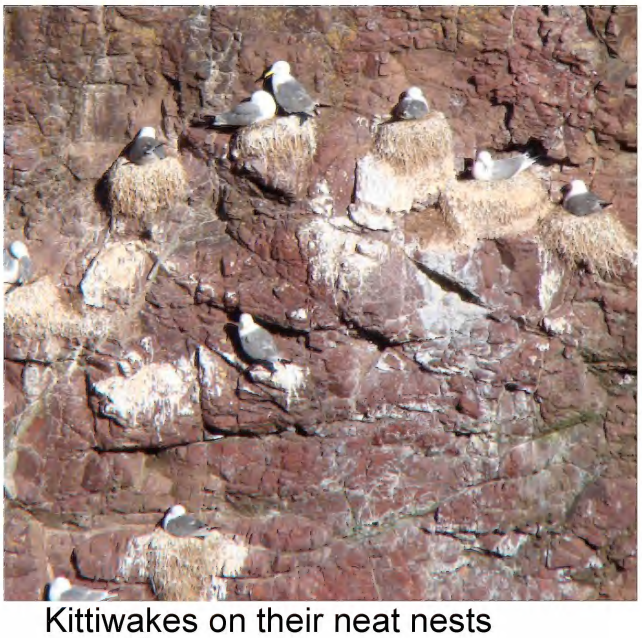
Guillemots below the lighthouse

Rugged shoreline at Pettico Wick

Kittiwakes in typical location

Folded sedimentary rock at Pettico Wick

Razorbills



Kittiwakes on their neat nests

Mire Loch

Marsh Orchids (above) and Thrift or Sea Lavender

St. Abbs fishing village

Nature Notes Aug '48

George Broadway

Specimens sent for identification to Mr Crosbie Morrison, Editor of "Wildlife" magazine which was published from 1938 until the early fifties. He also had a weekly radio program which attracted many listeners, and participated in broadcasts to schools, a session which I very much enjoyed and looked forward to. Do any of you remember those broadcasts ?

Now for the specimens discussed in August 1948, just seventy years ago. At this period the magazine cost all of one shilling.

Mammals

Wartook: Short-headed Phalanger, known to us as a Sugar-glider, *Petaurus breviceps*. They feed on nectar from blossoms, manna and probably tender leaf tips with insects for variety. Tree clearing has reduced their numbers considerably (1948)

Sunbury: "Grey possum-like creature, 15 inches (38 cm) from head to tip of tail found dead on transformer. If it had a white tip to a not bushy tail, then it would be a baby ringtail possum. If the tail was smooth and grey for the basal half and the remainder a brush of long black fur, then most likely a Phascogale, or perhaps a Brush-tailed Bush Rat. If tail all bushy and grey, body with flaps extending from wrist to ankle, face not pointed, then a Sugar Glider.

Insects

Reservoir: The perfectly domed beetle was probably found on or near a gum tree. It has no common name which is strange because they are common and attract attention. They have been called Ladybirds which is incorrect as they are twice the size and have a different sculpture and colouring. The scientific name which could be used as a common name is *Paropsis* sp.

Marshdale NSW: Spiny Leaf Insect, *Extatsoma tiaratum,* a tropical and subtropical insect of the Phasma family. Its strange armament of spikes and leaf-like expansions make it look quite botanical. In spite of its ferocious appearance It is inoffensive and is completely vegetarian.

South Yarra: "Old Clothes Man", larva of the Golden Lacewing, sometimes called the "Aphis Lion" because it feeds voraciously on aphids on roses etc.

Carrum: Chrysalis of the Vine Hawk Moth which pupates just under the surface of the ground without a cocoon.

No address: Biscuit coloured frothy mass the size of a small plum was the egg case of the larger native Praying Mantis.

Melbourne: A Wood-boring beetle, apparently a native of the British Isles. Not a cloth-eating type. It probably alighted on the cloth before packing, so accidentally included in the bale and subsequently tried to eat its way out.

Mundingburra: A sap-sucking bug ,*Tectocoris lineola,* so large and with such a brightly coloured scutellum that it resembles a beetle. It feeds on a variety of native vegetation and has apparently become a pest in cotton plantations. It is

known in some parts as the "Chinese Beetle" because of the markings on the back which resemble Chinese writing.

Spiders

Miranda NSW: " A peculiar web hard to describe". I assume it consisted of golden coloured silk. It would be the Satin-back Nephila spider harmless to human beings.

Swan Hill: (This specimen came from a lady who was later a colleague of mine at Mildura High School. I used to take her to meetings of the SFNC which were held in Red Cliffs)
Mallee Mouse Spider, *Eriodon occatorium.* Female, a typical trapdoor spider found in northern Victoria. Despite the fearsome-looking fangs and aggressive behaviour it is not regarded as dangerous. There is no record of a bite requiring medical attention.

General

Essendon: Johnny Hairylegs, the House Centipede, frequently found in houses but also under bark. It is a beneficial creature as among other insects it feeds on silverfish.

Balwyn: Not Ambergris, but portion of a decayed swede turnip, probably dropped from one of the ketches which carry swedes as bulk cargo from Tasmania to the Melbourne market.

Narooma NSW: A small scorpion, much too small to be of any danger although it could cause a painful sting. Often they come into houses and for some obscure reason are found in baths and sinks.

Moden: The Mediterranean snail, *Helix pisana,* which is the dominant species around the West Australian coast and is also found in Mt Gambier and Geelong. We have not heard it called "The Italian Tree Snail' before, but that is a good descriptive name for it as apparently it originated in Italy and it certainly climbs trees.

Rosebud: Swim bladder of a fish (pictured right) and a bunch of Octopus eggs.

Bird Quiz

Nigel Harland

The bird featured last month was the White-bellied Sea Eagle. It is almost as big as the Wedge-tailed Eagle and probably more spectacular in plumage. Despite its name, the Sea Eagle can often be found far inland and has been seen regularly in our area. It can often be seen high up, floating on level wings. Apart from Australia the bird can be seen in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

The bird for next month is shown at right.

Wednesday Wildflower Wanders

Our traditional wildflower outings will be held again in September, on 12th 19th and 26th of September and 3rd of October.
We meet at **4 pm sharp** at the car park opposite the Castle Motel.
An appointed leader will take us to a known local area for native wildflowers, to browse for usually one to two hours.

The grassland field trip in May

Zoe Thomson led the May field trip to Montgomery Street Grassland, a very well nibbled grassland or grassy woodland with Kangaroo grass dominating the slope. A small floppy fence is working well to reduce the grazing pressure, so this was the only spot where the grass had seeded; more of those fences scattered across the site please. Zoe could see even in dormancy of winter a variety herbs, lichens & mosses - offering good promise for a pretty show in the spring.

The grassland sits amongst the urban setting that Zoe knows well and we could see some of the impacts of often unthinking neighbours. Some suggestions are to pursue planting of flowering herbs near the gate and in prominent spots viewed by the road. Promote the benefits of ground storey & mid-layer shrubs for bringing in the birds which might result in a better interface with the neighbours to the south who have nesting boxes but no ground storey.

Zoe talked about the power of local knowledge of sites and what they contain and how we need to continue to speaking up for them. Don't assume people know what you know about your special spot. Our sincere thanks to Zoe for her generous contributions to our May program.

Dianne and Zoe Thomson

The Birds of Sutton Grange

Nigel Harland

A while ago, Chris Timewell wrote an article recalling a monthly article by Susannah Starr on The Birds of Sandon. As a result, I have decided to write a similar piece each month on the Birds of Sutton Grange. The list will be of the birds seen on or from our property.

Red Wattlebird	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	New Holland Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella	Crimson RosellaRed-rumped
ParrotSpotted Pardalote	Tree Martin	Welcome Swallow
Galah	White-browed Scrubwren	Superb Fairy Wren
Australian Raven	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Grey Shrikethrush
Willie Wagtail	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Red-browed Finch
Common Bronzewing	Eastern Rosella	Musk Lorikeet

Most of these are long term residents, some come and go and some are rarities – like the Musk Lorikeet this month. One point to note is the lack of raptors. In the days of rabbits, I used to see perhaps ten different raptors on a regular basis, compared to just one this time.

Observations reported at the July meeting

Natalie de Maccus – Dead Red-browed Finch found by house – no apparent cause. Denis noted that when very cold, these finches don't move away when approached.

Denis Hurley – Visiting Lake Mungo - impact of drought on Western Grey Kangaroos, licking water from any wet surface they could find.

Richard Piesse –

Two male Lyrebirds seen close up in Dandenongs. [right]

Dwarf Greenhood rosettes observed during a visit to Long Forest.

Nodding Greenhood rosettes seen in Kalimna – George has seen these in Kaweka also.

Will we have enough winter rain for flowers to develop?

Geraldine reported sighting *Brush-tailed Phascogales in their house, as revealed by scats and urine dropped on a toilet lid! Were they trying to do the right thing?

Tanya Loos has Agile Antichinus in her kitchen, and Beri Perry recalled their presence in her former house in Guildford, where they appeared to keep the mouse population down.

Beri reported four Spotted Pardalotes on the ground in Wheeler St, not concerned by her presence – see Denis's comment about small birds not moving when cold.

* Geraldine also sent in these pictures of a Brush-tailed Phascogale outside the house – taken in May by her son Jarrod.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri August 10 meeting: speaker DAMIEN COOK on wetlands renewal

Sat August 11 field trip: a local wetland area with Damien Cook

Mon August 27* Roadside clean-up. Organiser Geoff Harris
9 a.m. start at cnr. Golf Links road on Pyrenees Highway
Takes 1 – 2 hrs., Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Garbage bags and reflective vests will be supplied. Please note KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside. ***NB change of date as Geoff not available on 13th**

Fri Sept 14 meeting: speaker Peter Turner; New Zealand wonders

Sat Sept 15 field trip: Maldon Orchids with David Elliot

Fri Oct 12 meeting: speaker Pam Whiteley – Wildlife health surveillance

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2018
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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